

James Madison to William Pinkney, October 30, 1810. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO WILLIAM PINKNEY.¹

¹ From the *Works of Madison* (Congressional Edition). The letter is also printed in part in Wheaton's *Life, Writings, and Speeches of William Pinkney*, 449. Pinkney's letter was dated August 14th. Lord Wellesley's letter to him of July 22d contained but two sentences: "I think it may be difficult to enter upon the subject of your last note, (respecting the diplomatic rank of our minister in America,) in any official form.

"But I have no difficulty in assuring you, that it is my intention immediately to recommend the appointment of an envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary from the king to the United States."— *American Archives*, iii., *Foreign Affairs*, 363.

Washington, October 30, 1810.

Dear Sir, —Your letter of August 13 [14] was duly received. Its observations on the letter and conduct of Lord Wellesley are an interesting comment on both. The light in which the letter was seen by many in this Country was doubtless such as gave to its features an exaggerated deformity. But it was the natural effect of its contrast to the general expectation founded on the tenor of your private letter to Mr. Smith, and on the circumstances, which, in the case of Jackson, seemed to preclude the least delay in repairing the insults committed by him. It is true, also, that the letter, when viewed in its most favorable light, is an unworthy attempt to spare a false pride on one side at the expence of just feelings on the other, and is in every respect infinitely below the elevation

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of character assumed by the British Government, and even to that ascribed to Lord Wellesley. It betrays the consciousness of a debt, with a wish to discharge it in false coin. Had the letter been of earlier date, and accompanied by the prompt appointment of a successor to Jackson, its aspect would have been much softened. But every thing was rendered as offensive as possible

by evasions and delays, which admit no explanation without supposing a double game, by which they were to cheat us into a reliance on fair promises, whilst they were playing into the hands of partizans here, who were turning the delays into a triumph over their own Government. This consideration had its weight in the decision last communicated, with respect to your continuance at London, or return to the United States.

The personal sensibilities which your letter expresses are far greater than I can have merited by manifestations of esteem and confidence which it would have been unjust to withhold. As a proof of your partiality, they ought not, on that account, to excite less of a return. As little ought your readiness to retire from your station, from the honorable motives which govern you, to be viewed in any other light than as a proof of the value which attaches itself to your qualifications and services. It is not to be denied that a good deal of dissatisfaction has issued through the press against some of your intercourse with the British Government. But this could have the less influence on the Executive mind, as the dissatisfaction, where not the mere indulgence of habitual censure, is evidently the result of an honest misconstruction of some things, and an ignorance of others, neither of which can be lasting. I have little doubt that if your sentiments and conduct could be seen through media not before the public,

a very different note would have been heard; and as little, that the exhibitions likely to grow out of the questions and discussions in which you are at present engaged will more than restore the ground taken from you.

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The sole question on which your return depends, therefore, is whether the conduct of the Government where you are may not render your longer stay incompatible with the honor of the United States. The last letter of the Secretary of State has so placed the subject for your determination, in which the fullest confidence is felt. Waiving other depending subjects, not of recent date, a review of the course pursued in relation to Jackson and a successor excites a mixture of indignation and contempt, which ought not to be more lightly expressed than by your *immediately* substituting a Secretary of Legation for the grade you hold; unless the step be absolutely forbidden by the weighty consideration which has been stated to you, and which coincides with the sound policy to which you allude, of putting an adversary compleatly in the wrong. The prevailing opinion here is, that this has been already abundantly done.

Besides the public irritation produced by the persevering insolence of Jackson in his long stay, and his conduct during it, there has been a constant heart-burning on the subject of the Chesapeake, and a deep and settled indignation on the score of impressments, which can never be extinguished without a liberal atonement for the former, and a systematic amendment of the latter.

You have been already informed that the Proclamation would issue giving effect to the late act of Congress, on the ground of the Duke de Cadore's letter to Genl Armstrong, which states an *actual* repeal of the French Decrees. The letter of W. to you is a promise only, and that in a very questionable shape; the more so, as G. Britain is known to have founded her retaliating pretensions on the *unprecedented mode* of warfare against her; evidently meaning the exclusion of her trade from the Continent. Even the blockade of May, 1806, rests on the same foundation. These considerations, with the obnoxious exercise of her sham blockades in the moment of our call for their repeal, backed by the example of France, discourage the hope that she contemplates a reconciliation with us. I sincerely wish your next communications may furnish evidence of a more favorable disposition.

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It will not escape your notice, and is not undeserving that of the British Government, that the nonintercourse, as now to be revived, will have the effect of giving a monopoly of our exportations to G. Britain to our own vessels, in exclusion of hers; whereas, in its old form, G. Britain obtained a substantial monopoly for hers through the entrepots of N. Scotia, E. Florida, &c. She cannot, therefore, deprive our vessels, which may now carry our exports directly to G. Britain, of this monopoly, without refusing the exports altogether, or forcing them into difficult and expensive channels, with the prospect of a counteracting interposition of Congress, should the latter experiment be resorted to. Nothing would be necessary to defeat this experiment but to prohibit, as was heretofore contemplated, the export of our productions to the neighboring ports belonging to Great Britain or her friends.

The course adopted here towards West Florida will be

made known by the Secretary of State. The occupancy of the Territory as far as the Perdido was called for by the crisis there, and is understood to be within the authority of the Executive. East Florida, also, is of great importance to the United States, and it is not probable that Congress will let it pass into any new hands. It is to be hoped G. Britain will not entangle herself with us by seizing it, either with or without the privity of her allies in Cadiz. The position of Cuba gives the United States so deep an interest in the destiny, even, of that Island, that although they might be an inactive, they could not be a satisfied spectator at its falling under any European Government, which might make a fulcrum of that position against the commerce and security of the United States. With respect to Spanish America generally, you will find that G. Britain is engaged in the most eager, and, if without the concurrence of the Spanish authority at Cadiz, the most reproachful grasp of political influence and commercial preference. In turning a provident attention to the new world, as she loses ground in the old, her wisdom is to be commended, if regulated by justice and good faith; nor is her pursuit of commercial preferences, if not seconded by insidious and slanderous means against our competitions, as are said to be employed, to

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be tested by any other standard than her own interest. A sound judgment of this does not seem to have been consulted in the specimen given in the Treaty at Caraccas, by which a preference in trade over all other nations is extorted from the temporary fears and necessities of the Revolutionary Spaniards. The policy of the French Government at the epoch of our Independence, in renouncing every stipulation against the equal privileges of all other nations in our trade, was dictated by a much better knowledge of human nature, and of the stable interest of France.

The elections for the next Congress are nearly over. The result is another warning against a reliance on the strength of a British Party, if the British Government be still under a delusion on that subject. Should France effectually adhere to the ground of a just and conciliatory policy, and G. Britain bring the United States to issue on her paper blockades; so strong is this ground in right of opinion here, and even in the commitment of all the great leaders of her party here, that G. Britain will scarce have an advocate left.